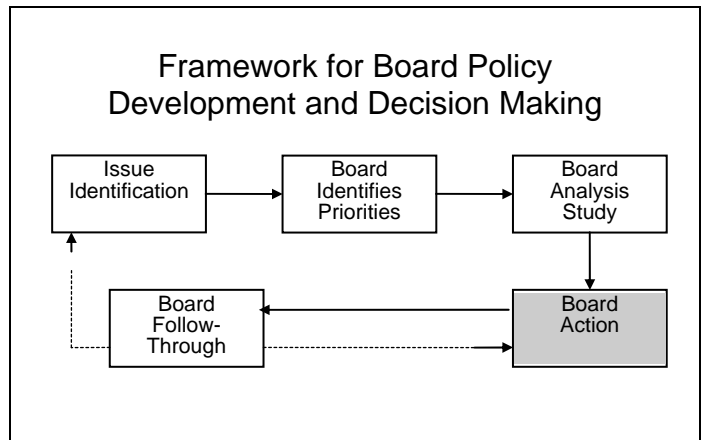


Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

September 11, 2008



Agenda Item: AEA Accreditation

Iowa Goal: (2) All K-12 students will achieve at a high level.

Equity Impact Statement: Each AEA is required to address and support agency standards on multicultural gender-fair approaches and meeting the diverse educational needs of students in their agency's Comprehensive Improvement Plan (CIP) and in the services provided to the LEAs.

Presenter: Tom Cooley, School Improvement Consultant and AEA Site Visit Team Co-leader

Sharon Hawthorne, Special Education Consultant and AEA Site Visit Team Co-leader

Attachments: 2

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board approve the recommendations for AEA accreditation submitted by the Director.

Background: Chapter 273.9 of the Code of Iowa provides authority for the State Board of Education to set standards and procedures for the accreditation of AEAs. These standards and procedures are contained in Chapter 72 of Iowa Administrative Code.

This report will focus on the findings forwarded by the visitation teams for the AEAs that received on-site visitations during spring 2008 (Green Valley AEA 14 and Great Prairie AEA 15).

Green Valley Area Education Agency Accreditation Summary 2008

Site Visit Focus

The central purpose of the accreditation visit is to help Area Education Agencies (AEAs) improve the quality and focus of their services, which will in turn assist schools and school districts to improve learning for students. Iowa's AEAs are a critical part of the support structure for schools and ultimately for children. With so much at stake, maintaining high standards or quality in programs and services is a top priority.

Onsite visits are an essential part of the AEA accreditation process. AEA site visits conducted during the school year reflect the requirements outlined in 281—IAC Chapter 72. As a result, the following procedures were applied:

- Assessment of the eight accreditation standards:
 - 1) School/Community Planning (SCP),
 - 2) Professional Development (PD),
 - 3) Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CIA),
 - 4) Diverse Learning Needs (DL),
 - 5) Media (M),
 - 6) School Technology (ST),
 - 7) Multicultural/Gender Fair (MC/GF), and
 - 8) Leadership (L)
- Assessment of each of the eight standards in relation to eleven criteria:
 - 1) AEA services respond to the needs of schools and school districts.
 - 2) AEA services are data-based.
 - 3) AEA services are research-driven.
 - 4) AEA services demonstrate proactive leadership.
 - 5) AEA services are supported by aligned agency resources.
 - 6) AEA services are equitably available.
 - 7) AEA services align with agency-wide goals.
 - 8) Action plans shall include evidence of meeting all standards for services.
 - 9) AEA services include a process to monitor the implementation of the service.
 - 10) AEA services include a system of measuring the effectiveness of services provided.
 - 11) AEA services include a system for measuring the efficiency of services provided.
- Assessment of the services provided for established agency-wide goals.

Site Visit Desired Results

- The agency can address accreditation expectations.
- The agency can consistently deliver services that, in aggregate, meet the 11 Criteria for Standards.
- The agency uses site visit findings to continuously improve the quality of services that positively impact student learning.

Levels of Accreditation Pursuant to 281—IAC 72.11(4)

Accreditation applies to the entire agency, not to individual programs, services, or actions.

281—IAC Chapter 72 designates two accreditation options:

- **The State Board of Education grants Continuation of Accreditation** if the agency meets all standards and other requirements.
- **The State Board of Education grants Conditional Accreditation** if the agency has not met all standards and other requirements.

Green Valley AEA Summary of Findings

AEA Accreditation Standards	Met or Not Met
School/Community Planning	Met
Professional Development	Met
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Met
Diverse Learning Needs	Met
Multicultural/Gender Fair (MCGF)	Met
Media	Met
School Technology	Met
Leadership	Met

It is suggested the agency consider these strengths and suggested areas of improvement within the merger discussions being held with Loess Hills AEA 13.

Agency-Wide Areas of Strength

1. **Relationship with LEAs.** Many interviewees expressed appreciation for the work of the agency staff. LEA interviewees cited the visibility and accessibility (can “call them anytime”) of agency staff, media staff’s constant willingness to help (e.g., “ask for two items, get five plus a call to see if that was enough”), expertise provided to the LEAs, and follow-up on development of District Support Plans. According to one LEA interviewee, “We feel like they [agency staff] are part of us.” Examples of how agency staff responds to LEA needs included the following:
 - Email
 - Keeping LEAs up to date on information (“keep us ahead of the eight ball”)
 - Co-teaching with math teachers
 - Collaboration and modeling from the consultants
2. **Exploring Funding Opportunities.** According to interviewees, the agency has leveraged resources by searching for available funding opportunities. The agency has marshaled many resources and partnerships from within and outside the region to enhance its services. Examples include:
 - Partnership with Child Health Specialty Clinics
 - Title II Grant partnerships with Drake and Pioneer
 - Participation with Shared Visions
 - DEKKO Mathematics Grant with AEA 13
 - Perkins Grant/Career and Technology Education with Southwest Iowa Community College

3. **AEA Administration.** AEA and LEA interviewees were appreciative of the “open door policy” and other efforts of agency administration to meet the needs of LEAs. Agency administrators are viewed as educational leaders by the LEAs and recognized as being focused on improving student outcomes. Efforts to improve student outcomes include the following examples:
 - Use of the Guiding Coalition to review and analyze student achievement data and form groups to work on identified areas of need (e.g., students performing in the non-proficient range). As a result of the Guiding Coalition format, there has been agency-wide rollout of Instructional Decision Making (IDM), changes in efforts to address elementary reading, use of research-based interventions, and improvements in delivery of special education instruction.
 - Interaction of the agency Leadership and Planning (LAP) team with LEA building teams to improve student results. This interaction is based on review of student data.
 - Addition of a Lead Team in Math based on the success of the Lead Team in Reading.
4. **Continuous Improvement.** Written evidence and information from interviewees indicate the agency has focused on continuous improvement, including changes with media services, delivery of professional development, and regional organization. Supporting examples are listed below:
 - Media services improvements since the agency's last accreditation visit, including introduction of a key word system to assist in locating materials
 - Use of a “filtering process” to determine technology purchases
 - Use of data, including review of LEA needs and student outcomes, to determine professional development offerings
 - Use of a structured follow up process for professional development, including administration of surveys four to six weeks and six months following a class
 - Responding to LEA's futures needs (e.g., Content Strategy Integration [CSI] Team, support for high school reform efforts)
 - Structuring the agency into three regions: East, West, and Central
 - Adjustment of the building contact role and responsibilities and assignment of individuals to meet the needs of the LEAs
 - Development and use of an agency database to track staff involvement/interaction with LEAs
5. **Special Education: Early ACCESS and Early Childhood:** The agency's efforts in addressing Early ACCESS and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) exceed requirements in several areas as noted below.
 - The agency does follow up family training in the natural environment when children have received specialized services in non-natural environments (e.g., Child Health Specialty Clinics).
 - The agency has a mentoring and training program for new Early ACCESS employees, which includes shadowing of experienced employees during family visits.
 - The agency developed six considerations around ECSE least restrictive environment (LRE) that have been presented to preschool teachers in each region of the agency. Support is provided to districts that are struggling with this area.
 - The agency assists districts to provide assistance for preschoolers by either having a separate Student Assistance Team (SAT) for 3-5 year olds or including preschoolers in established elementary SATs. If there is a referral on a child in a community-based preschool those personnel are invited to become participants on the SAT.

Agency-wide Suggested Areas of Improvement

1. **Diversity Issues.** Management interviewees noted discussions are held with district superintendents to help them become comfortable with diversity in their LEAs. Issues discussed include the increasing Hispanic population, students of low socio-economic status (SES), and gay and lesbian students. Interviewees reported that there have been “blatant examples of LEAs not dealing fairly with students of low SES.” The agency is encouraged to expand its efforts to address these topics beyond district administrators. This could include providing information, training, and follow-up regarding diversity issues to LEA building staff members. It is also suggested the agency purposefully incorporate diversity-related topics and use of multi-cultural, gender fair approaches into its professional development offerings (both internal and external).
2. **Meeting LEA Needs.** Interviewees consistently cited development of District Support Plans as a main means through which LEA needs are identified and related agency services/initiatives/programs developed. It was unclear, however, what problem-solving process the agency follows if its offerings do not match an individual LEA’s needs or if the LEA chooses not to participate. If a process does not exist, the agency is encouraged to develop one. If one does exist, the agency is encouraged to clarify to LEAs how decisions regarding agency services are made. The agency is also encouraged to continue efforts to assist schools/districts interested in pursuing other programs by linking them to other schools with the same interests as well as appropriate external resources.
3. **Communication with LEAs.** LEA interviewees questioned how information flows from the agency through LEA administration to staff, expressed concern regarding the lack of information coming from the agency, and identified isolated incidences where an LEA did not receive information. This includes information regarding merger discussions, programs/efforts eliminated or considered for elimination, and agency staff changes. Consider broadening the agency’s means of communication, such as offering content specific listserves.
4. **Sustaining Grants.** Interviewees noted several services provided by the agency that include grant funding (e.g., Pioneers Professional Development Program and DEKKO Foundation). Concern was expressed regarding the sustainability of services and resources once grant funds are no longer available. The agency is encouraged to clearly and continually communicate the sustainability plan, including LEA responsibilities, included within each of its grant applications to all impacted stakeholders.
5. **LEA Capacity Building.** Multiple interviewees indicated need for continued capacity building at the LEA level. Consider providing ongoing support to LEAs in the following areas:
 - data access and analysis
 - leadership development (e.g., responsibility as instructional leaders)
 - local delivery of quality professional development
6. **Administrator Recruitment.** LEA interviewees identified the need to recruit and train new administrators. Interviewees suggested it would be beneficial for the agency to reinstitute administrative endorsement programs through partnerships with institutes of higher education. The agency is encouraged to consider this suggestion, as well as engage with LEAs to identify potential administrator candidates.

7. **Diverse Learner Needs.** Due to limited responses from interviewees, the site visit team noted the needs of diverse learners (e.g., English Language Learners, Homeless, gifted and talented) may not be adequately addressed within current initiatives and programs. Review of the agency's 2002-2003 accreditation visit report also indicated support for the areas of At-Risk and gifted and talented were suggested areas of improvement. The agency is encouraged to strengthen its efforts by purposefully integrating support for meeting the needs of diverse learners into its existing initiatives and programs through IDM. This may include supporting LEAs to make better use of available demographic and achievement data. Development of a process to specifically evaluate the effectiveness of services provided to address diverse learner needs is also suggested. Iowa Department of Education (DE) consultants Rosanne Malek (515-281-3199) (Gifted and Talented Programs), Susan Walkup (515-281-5718) (Learning Supports), and Cyndy Erickson (515-281-8514) (Learning Supports) could provide additional assistance.
8. **Special Education: Co-Teaching.** The agency has promoted and provided training and follow up on use of the Co-Teaching model. Interviewees indicated this has been a learning process for districts. When developing individualized education programs (IEPs), IEP team members are encouraged to consider what steps will be taken if a student does not succeed in a co-teaching situation. The agency is encouraged to continue reminding districts of the need to consider the continuum of services when planning for special education students.
9. **Special Education: Student Discipline Guidelines.** Special education interviewees noted some district administrators and IEP team members appear to lack awareness of guidelines regarding discipline of special education students, including the rules around suspension of students with IEPs and parental rights regarding suspension. A need to provide ways to help students deal with people in authority who are perceived to be unreasonable was also noted. Consider developing training for district administrators and IEP team members that will inform them of the guidelines regarding student discipline and assist in the implementation of those guidelines at the building level. DE consultants Barbara Rankin (515-281-5447) (Challenging Behaviors) or Barbara Ohlund (515-281-6111) (Research and Evaluation) could provide assistance for these areas.
10. **Special Education: LRE.** The agency's percentage of students with IEPs removed from general education less than 21% of the day has improved from 49% in 2005-06 to 61% in 2006-07; however, the agency has not reviewed the impact of this improvement. Consider performing an analysis of data to determine the instructional and social impact on the students with IEPs who have had their time in general education environments increased.
11. **Special Education: Diplomas.** Special education interviewees noted not all high school programs within the agency offer regular diplomas for special education students. Consider ways to assist district administration in understanding the importance of awarding regular diplomas to students with who meet core graduation requirements regardless of their educational setting.

Accreditation Status: Green Valley AEA

Green Valley Area Education Agency is recommended for continuing accreditation pursuant to 281—IAC Chapter 72.

Great Prairie Area Education Agency Accreditation Summary 2008

Site Visit Focus

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Great Prairie AEA Summary of Findings

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Multicultural/Gender Fair (MCGF)	Met
Media	Met
School Technology	Met
Leadership	Met

Note: The Juvenile Detention Center (Chariton), Juvenile Shelter (Ottumwa), and South Iowa Juvenile Detention Center (Montrose) educational programs were reviewed as a part of the AEA accreditation visit. Review of self-assessment data provided to the site visit team prior to the visit indicated compliance with all the program requirements of 281—IAC Chapter 63.

Agency-Wide Areas of Strength

1. **Media Services.** Local Education Agency (LEA) and Area Education Agency (AEA) interviewees highlighted the agency's Media Services area as a strength, noting the following:
 - Agency staff collects and uses media circulation data to determine whether LEA needs are being met.
 - Agency staff is available at night and on weekends to respond to email inquiries.
 - There is reflection of diversity within resources. For example, the media center forwards information to school districts on award winning literature by and about diverse racial/ethnic groups, both men and women, and persons with disabilities.
 - Media staff is proactive in providing resources to LEAs (e.g., "resources are sometimes provided before we even know we need them").
 - Media staff monitors usage data to identify which buildings are not using agency media services. Staff members then provide inservices to these buildings regarding resources and services available through the agency.
 - The agency's media specialist is highly regarded.
2. **Response to Needs.** LEA interviewees shared appreciation for the agency's consultants. LEA interviewees stated agency staff responds quickly to requests for information, research, and support. Staff members were described as accessible, flexible, and responsive. Interviewees indicated special education teams assigned to the LEAs share special education updates, communicate and listen to district needs, and find staff to provide support for specific needs (e.g., Autism).

3. **Merger.** Although concerns were shared, interviewees indicated improvements have occurred as result of the merger. Interviewees provided the following as examples:
 - Availability of co-training opportunities
 - The ability of LEAs to share ideas with a greater number of, and similar size, districts
 - Differentiating professional development based on district needs
 - Most professional development offerings are available at multiple sites
 - Addition of the agency's Human Resources Director position
4. **Professional Development.** LEA interviewees were appreciative of professional development opportunities provided through the agency. Interviewees noted offerings support of curricular areas, focus on meeting the needs of diverse learners, and utilize the Iowa Professional Development Model (IPDM), including use of research-based strategies. Professional development sessions are offered in multiple locations and times have been adjusted to accommodate LEA needs. Multiple methods are used to assess the effectiveness of these offerings, including Quick Writes, surveys, classroom monitoring of implementation, and use of implementation logs.
5. **Special Education: Early ACCESS.** The agency has several strong Early ACCESS and early childhood partnerships, including Child Health Specialty Clinics (CHSC), Empowerment areas, and Early Head Start. The agency and CHSC have combined state funds to hire one full time and one half-time service coordinator that focus on drug exposed, high medical need, and premature infants. These partnerships help provide effective services for infants and toddlers, allow leveraging of resources, reduce duplication of services, benefit parents, and help assure school readiness.
6. **Special Education: Strategies.** The agency is focusing on implementation of strategies that have been learned by agency and LEA staff prior to introducing new strategies. For example, agency staff members model effective co-teaching practices in classrooms and use those practices during professional development trainings.
7. **Print/Production Services.** Interviewees were complimentary regarding agency Print/Production Services. They reported services are timely and work is of professional quality. Print/Production staff members work with internal and external staff to meet print/production needs, such as brochures, Picture Word Inductive Model (PWIM) posters, pamphlets, newsletters, and yearbooks. LEA interviewees viewed the service as being cost efficient for the LEAs.

Agency-wide Suggested Areas of Improvement

1. **Staffing Challenges.** Agency and LEA interviews indicated concerns exist regarding agency staffing. An agency interviewee stated, "We don't have the people needed in social work, psychology and speech services to do the type of work we need to do. There aren't enough of us to do the work." LEA interviewees suggested designated agency staff time is not meeting LEA needs for Career and Technical Education, diversity, mentoring, multicultural, gender fair approaches, assessment, and data support. The agency is encouraged to:
 - seek additional input from agency and LEA staff regarding these concerns;
 - review current staffing patterns;
 - determine if trainings to build capacity of current staff or hiring of additional staff is needed;
 - communicate staffing decisions to agency and external stakeholders.

2. **Communication: Merger.** Team members noted differing perceptions regarding awareness and availability of agency services between interviewees from former AEAs 15 and 16. The team realizes Great Prairie AEA is in the first year as a newly merged agency and these differences are part of the change process. Agency leadership is encouraged to attend to LEA perceptions about agency services which exist as a result of the merger by continuing dialogue with LEAs regarding agency services.
3. **Communication: Data Sharing.** Interviewees noted they have multiple opportunities to provide input regarding agency services, including formal surveys and informal comments; however, they provided inconsistent responses regarding how data from the various surveys administered by the agency (e.g., Customer Survey) are used to inform decisions. Questions were raised regarding who has access to these data and how the data are shared with stakeholders. The agency is encouraged to develop procedures for communicating to internal and external stakeholders findings from the surveys, how survey data are used, and agency decisions related to these data.
4. **Agency Website.** Interviewees identified the agency website as a main source of information about the agency. Concerns were expressed regarding the usability and navigation of the website for ordering media, accessing information about and registering for professional development offerings, and accessing the HEART database. Consider forming a focus group or advisory group to review the website and make suggestions regarding website issues. The agency might also consider providing greater deference to diversity issues within this review.
5. **Assessing Nonpublic School Needs.** A four-year cycle for customer input is currently in place for public school districts. Interviewees indicated nonpublic schools are not included in this cycle. The agency is encouraged to include all nonpublic schools served by the agency within the four-year cycle. This would ensure nonpublic schools have equitable opportunity for providing input to the agency.
6. **Collaboration.** Former AEA 16 staff members commented on the value of Partnering for Improvement meetings. During these meetings, agency staff used district data to show potential impact of legislation, used the SINA process to conduct gap analysis, and discussed other LEA needs. Agency and district staff attended these meetings based on the topic. Consider using this type of structure to supplement the agency's four-year cycle for customer input. Doing so might provide an additional avenue to address the School and Community Planning standard and the agency's goal of improving the quality of its services.
7. **Multi-cultural, Gender Fair.** With the exception of media services and a few isolated equity workshops, there is minimal evidence the agency provides on-going technical assistance to LEAs in developing MCGF approaches to instruction or including MCGF concepts in written curriculum (i.e., developing instructional strategies and student activities related to responsibilities, rights, and respect for diversity). To strengthen the agency's efforts to meet the Chapter 72 MCGF Standard, it will take a collaborative effort between the agency's equity coordinators, media services, curriculum support specialists, and professional development staff. It is suggested the agency provide ongoing training and support for LEA equity coordinators, curriculum directors, and building principals to create common understanding of MCGF concepts and approaches.

8. **Demographics.** Many LEA interviewees expressed a need for strategies to work with demographic-related issues, such as children of poverty and recent immigrants. They also indicated learning how to partner or engage the current generation of parents would be beneficial. The agency is encouraged to:
- examine agency-wide demographic data to determine existing populations and their unique needs;
 - seek or revisit research-supported strategies to address these identified needs; and
 - create professional development to assist agency and LEA staff in implementing these strategies.
9. **Equity: Staff Diversity.** Interviewees and documents indicate lack of diversity among agency staff and participants on advisory committees. The board policy on EEO/AA and the administrative statement within the EEO/AA plan could be strengthened by more assertively making the case for why diverse role models on staff can better assist the agency in carrying out its mission to support school districts' efforts to increase student achievement for all students and eliminate achievement gaps. Lack of diversity among current agency staff makes it more important for the agency to include broader representation within its major advisory committees. This might be accomplished by including students and community members and seeking input from community based organizations located within the agency's boundaries.
10. **Special Education: Suspension/Expulsion Data.** Agency staff expressed concern regarding district suspension and expulsion rates for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The agency has worked with one district and will be working with one more to:
- target the effect of its discipline policies;
 - rewrite procedures regarding notification of the agency of days of suspension;
 - include Positive Behavior Supports in Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs);
 - write BIPs that include instruction of appropriate behaviors, not just classroom management procedures; and
 - assure district administrators share common definitions of suspension and expulsion.
- The agency is encouraged to expand this work to include all districts.
11. **Comprehensive Improvement System/Measurement of Effectiveness.** The agency has developed a computer-based system (GPAEA Comprehensive Improvement System [CIS]) to collect agency data as a means of accountability, one aspect being a way to quantify effectiveness of the agency's services. As the agency continues to grow this system, it is encouraged to seek input from internal staff regarding use of the system. It might be beneficial to discuss questions such as the following:
- What processes are used to assure data being collected are providing the types information needed by the agency?
 - How are the accuracy and reliability of the entered data ensured?
 - How are items added to the system monitored?
 - What professional development is provided or needed to assist system users?
 - How are the benefits of the system communicated to agency staff?
 - How might the system be extended to involve external agency stakeholders?
 - What trendline data might be generated through the system to assist with agency planning and decision-making?

Accreditation Status: Great Prairie AEA
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Great Prairie Area Education Agency is recommended for continuing accreditation pursuant to 281—IAC Chapter 72.